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MR. HUNTINGTON'S "REPUBLICAN COURT IN THE TIME OF WASHINGTON."

THE season of picture exhibitions has begun. The proprietors of Mr. Huntington's picture, which they announce by the compound title "The Republican Court in the Time of Washington, or Mrs. Washington's Reception Day" are the first in the field. This exhibition, like most of the exhibitions of single pictures, with which the New York public are entertained, is held for the purpose of getting subscribers to an engraving of the picture exhibited. There is a well known system of enticing the public, always followed by those who have an as yet unpublished engraving to dispose of. An easy running machine is set in motion, which is found efficacious in grinding down and polishing the casual visitor into the meek subscriber. The system has been followed by Mr. Seitz, or whomsoever it is that owns Mr. Huntington's picture, and Mr. Ritchie's engraving therefrom. A darkened room on Broadway is obtained. Much drapery surrounds the picture. Gas-lights, hidden from the eye, flame and flare above it. Sofas are disposed before it. A green cord keeps the curious at a distance from the picture. Keys to the picture, that is to say, outline etchings showing the disposition of the figures with numbered references, are dispersed about the room, and lie on all the sofas. Pamphlets descriptive of the picture, and each containing a key, are for sale, price fifteen cents. A print of the etching from the picture, with which the engraving was begun, is set up in a corner; the table on which it rests bears the open book inviting subscribers, and an attendant calls the attention of visitors to these appurtenances and their object. One thing only we miss, the tin "perspectives," through which they who have skill to

look, can see the picture so very much better! Let these be added to the preparations, that all may be as it has been of yore. This is the President of the National Academy of Design, whose picture is on exhibition at 625 Broadway; the subscription to the engraving ought not to be allowed to languish for want of some tin tubes.

The descriptive pamphlet begins with a mild appeal to the instinct of hero-worship, combined with a gentle word of assurance to those (if any) who may have entered with some doubt as to the merit of the picture. "This picture," says the pamphlet, "at once noble in its subject and charming in execution and treatment, is the work of Mr. Daniel Huntington, President of the National Academy of Design." Then we are told that "the original plan did not contemplate a result so broad and comprehensive: it was proposed to represent . . . some ten or fifteen figures," whereas we find in the picture sixty-two whole or partial figures, and two tops of heads, without visible features or limbs, but duly numbered. It seems, indeed, that "the subject expanded on his (the artist's) hands." How fortunate, that the canvas expanded too, "as he warmed to his work."

The pamphlet goes on to give an account of the means employed by the painter to obtain likenesses and other material for his work: and indeed they were the best means possible. To "consult the more accessible portraits by Copley and Stuart, the miniatures by Malbone, and the public records of the time," was quite right; to "procure family likenesses from the living descendants of many of his subjects," was wise; to "work with the mantle or robe before him" is a really Pre-

Raphaelite way to get up costume, on the discovery of which we congratulate Mr. Huntington; to paint a grandmother's portrait from her granddaughter, "when the likeness had been transmitted through two generations," is a good plan,—unfortunately, it is so hard to judge that that transmission has taken place; finally, when a face has been "laboriously transferred from parchment (?) or ivory to canvass," it is highly advisable to catch *any expression*, whether from "grandson or grand-niece" or elsewhere, which "would give it character and expression."

Indeed, Mr. Huntington's way of going to work would seem, on the pamphlet's authority, to have been a very rational and very thorough way. But, in view of the very feeble picture produced, we regret for the painter's sake that the pamphlet has been so frank. If, with such "remarkable opportunities," with reputation and assured position, and with the certainty of an ample pecuniary reward,—if with all these, Mr. Huntington has painted so valueless a picture, we are driven to look for the causes of the failure, where we should have no right to look, were the picture unheralded. It is not a sketch, it is not a hasty thought hastily painted, it is not a conception of the imagination, rapidly bodied forth lest it should escape;—the slow and labored process has been partially described, and further on, we find that the "artist's purpose was to represent in one frame the principal statesmen and belles who formed the republican court in Washington's second term." We have, then, a right to expect approximate perfection, excellence at least. Certainly a painter who cannot do well under these circumstances, ought not to paint at all. If we should throw down any such challenge, the challenged would

take it up, for the pamphlet says, that it is not doubted that the picture "will vastly enhance the artist's already national reputation."

It will. Whatever judgment any one may have formed, from the study of other pictures, of Mr. Huntington's powers as an artist, this will probably confirm it. Those who admire his work because he is P. N. A., and has a long-established name, will admire it all the more now that the picture is larger than usual and contains sixty-odd figures. Those who admire his work because of personal friendship or regard, will admire most that which has taken the most time and trouble to produce. Those who have looked in vain, year after year, to see some evidence that Mr. Huntington can draw the figure, will find none in this picture. Those who dislike his color exceedingly, will cease to hope that his color can ever please them. What his "national reputation" may be, we dare not attempt to describe in general terms, but it must be made up of individual opinions of his work;—these, we believe, will generally be confirmed by this picture.

The drawing is not worse than usual. We do not care to point out any figure or figures as exceptionally ill-drawn. We remember other pictures by this artist, in which there were figures attracting the eye to their deformity, as a monster at Barnum's attracts the childish and vulgar; such attraction there is none, here, and we gladly give Mr. Huntington this negative praise. For the rest, the color is so lifeless and cold, so "ashen grey,"—so much pink, and yellow, and vermillion, is united to make pale dulness, that we commend the choice of a dim and flickering gas light to partly hide the dreary truth. It would be well, however, to give a Saturday afternoon exhibition by daylight,—say at half price,—that all the young painters in the land might be

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induced to go and see what to avoid,—how pigments ought not to be used,—what color is not.

The made-up look of the grouping of the figures, is a thing of course. It is almost unknown to American art as yet, the conceiving of a thing as it might have happened, the composition of a scene as it might have appeared. This drawing-room assemblage among whom nothing is going on, where there is no principal action and very little bye-play, where Mrs. Washington waits upon her platform, with her two supporters, to receive those who do not come, while all present shrink away from the ordeal, while yet only the President himself seems prepared to act as usher, he being compelled to demonstrate to Miss Chew the propriety of paying her respects to the hostess, where the Duke of Kent knows no one to talk to, and Colonel Trumbull no one but his father, while eighteen ladies, as we count, are talking to each other or looking into vacancy,—this drawing-room assemblage in its utter absence of meaning, purpose, or leading idea, is a fair representation of the American Art of the past. Now, a drawing-room scene is not the noblest subject for Art, but may be excused as a good way to bring interesting people together, on canvass,

as in life. And a drawing-room scene, being of itself uninteresting and artificial, needs vigorous and realistic treatment to make it endurable. There is action in a drawing-room, if it is only the achievement of presentation, the progress of flirtations, the dropping of fans and handkerchiefs, the grouping in pairs and in clusters, the visible conversation. In all Mr. Huntington's picture there is but one sign of life; it is in the very centre of the canvass, where Arthur Middleton has Mrs. Drayton on his arm; it seems at first glance that he is about to lead her to Mrs. Washington, but that theory we had to give up. It will be well to find the first volume of "Once a Week," and to turn to page 352, where will be found an admirable drawing by M. J. Lawless, a historical picture, a faithful representation of a London evening party, all the company crowding the hall and staircase, for coolness and tea, between dances, the ladies covered with their opera cloaks, the footmen handing tea;—all as it is actually done. When we get a painter *de société* as much in earnest as Mr. Lawless, we may have an American party of the present or the past rightly painted.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONE.

A BEAUTIFUL DESCRIPTION.

"THE birth-day was come, and every thing was ready. The wall was all complete which protected the raised village road against the water, and so was the walk; passing the church for a short distance it followed the path which had been laid out by Charlotte, and then winding upwards among the rocks, inclined first under the summer-house to the right, and then, after a wide sweep, passed back above it to the right again, and so by degrees out on to the summit.

A large party had assembled for the occasion. They went first to church, where they found the whole congregation collected together in their holiday dresses. After service, they filed out in order; first the boys, then the young men, then the old; after them came the party from the castle, with their visitors and retinue; and the village maidens, young girls and women, brought up the rear.

At the turn of the walk, a raised stone seat had been contrived, where